FROM OUR
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Dear Maya Health Community,

I’m especially excited to share our latest annual report; 2023 was truly a transformative year!

Some highlights: More than ever, we’re seeing the power of centering language and community, particularly women, in our work and of using rigorous evaluation to improve our efforts to build health equity in Guatemala. Increasingly, our team members have been invited to share in international conversations on topics ranging from indigenous health to malnutrition to family planning. We have contributed to groundbreaking publications on diabetes care, language barriers to child development, and heart disease. We have received two major, multi-year grant awards to grow our life-saving work in Maternal & Infant Health and leverage artificial intelligence to prevent infant deaths. To enable this progress, we have expanded our Board and our team, which now includes more than 100 exceptional women and men dedicated to serving their communities.

These achievements indicate greater recognition that what we are doing works and that it has relevance not only in rural Guatemala but also in other contexts where similar challenges exist. This in turn inspires us to recommit to doing, learning, and sharing everything we can so that the best possible health and well-being are within reach for everyone, no matter where they were born or what language they speak.

Looking ahead, 2024 promises to be another momentous year. With a new Presidential Administration in place focused on better health for all Guatemalans, we could not be more excited about the possibilities for collaboration and advancement of our shared goals.

None of this would be possible without you. I am deeply grateful for your trust, support, and partnership and look forward to continuing our work together.

With great appreciation,

Anne Kraemer, CEO

Maya Health Alliance | Wuqu' Kawoq
2023 Annual Report
OUR WORK

Our Maya community health care providers partner with patients to develop practical, sustainable solutions to break down barriers to health and well-being like language, cost, distance, and discrimination.

Over more than 17 years, we have demonstrated that building capacity among Maya health care workers increases access to high-quality health care and improves health outcomes for those most in need. It also fosters dignity, opportunity, choice, and the promise of a better future for Guatemala’s Maya women and their families.

We continue to improve care with ongoing evaluation and feedback. We are a global leader in research and treatment models for chronic diseases, including child malnutrition, diabetes, and cancer.
Mission
Building equity and transforming health in rural Guatemala.

Vision
Everyone has access to high-quality care, no matter where they were born or what language they speak.
WHERE WE WORK

Guatemala is one of the most inequitable countries in the world and home to some of the poorest communities in the Western Hemisphere. The public health system is vastly under-resourced, receiving less than 2% of social spending. While nearly half of the population speaks a Mayan language, most healthcare is delivered in Spanish. These barriers, along with long-standing discrimination, prevent many indigenous people in rural areas from accessing basic health services.

Health outcomes reflect these disparities:

- As many as 70% of children in rural Maya communities suffer from malnutrition.
- Maternal mortality rates among indigenous women are three times as high as those of non-indigenous women.
- The rate of type 2 diabetes and pre-diabetes among indigenous people is 25% - more than double the national rate.

*We are working in hundreds of rural communities in nine states in Guatemala to close these gaps.*
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Working in rural Guatemala with historically marginalized populations, Maya Health Alliance | Wuqu’ Kawoq is at the forefront of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Challenge. Since we began in 2007, we have strived to create a self-sustaining, holistic approach to healthcare that recognizes the many layers of human well-being.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals are a natural fit with our aims and approach, and we have used them to refine our vision of healthcare in Guatemala. Currently, we are taking meaningful steps to fulfill many of the 17 goals:
2023 IMPACT

As one of the only organizations providing comprehensive healthcare in indigenous Mayan languages, Maya Health Alliance | Wuqu’ Kawoq serves more than 11,000 patients annually in hundreds of rural communities. About 90% of patients identify as women or girls. In addition to partnering with patients to improve their health and well-being, we work for systems-level change with a range of community, government, and civil sector partners. Additionally, we are committed to building understanding and driving change through research and evaluation. Our Center for Indigenous Health Research is one of the leading publishers of medical and scientific articles in Guatemala.

HEALTH SERVICES PROVIDED IN 2023

11,280 patients  35,665 visits

Including:

NUTRITION
794 patients  6,745 visits

WOMEN’S HEALTH
8,782 patients  21,934 visits

MATERNAL HEALTH
947 patients  2,657 visits

PRIMARY CARE
563 patients  2,288 visits

DIABETES
120 patients  1,741 visits

COMPLEX CARE
74 patients  300 visits
2023 HIGHLIGHTS

FEBRUARY
Research Fellow Dr. Gabriela Montenegro is honored with the 2023 OWSD-Elsevier Foundation Award for Early-Career Women Scientists in the Developing World.

Chief Medical Director Waleska López Canú presents on health equity before the Executive Secretariat of the Council of Ministers of Health of Central America and the Dominican Republic.

MAY
We completed the first Acciones Que Nutren (Actions that Nurture) master class designed to share effective strategies for fighting malnutrition with health workers across rural Guatemala.

JULY
Maya Health and partner safe-natal receive a $1.8 million award from Google.org to support our work using AI for safe and healthy births.

AUGUST
Guatemalans overwhelmingly elect reformist candidate Bernardo Arévalo of the Movimiento Semilla to be the next president.

OCTOBER
Indigenous community representatives organize roadblocks and protests against the efforts to keep Bernardo Arévalo from power.

NOVEMBER
Our research team publishes a major study on links between language-appropriate services and child development in The Lancet Global Health.

DECEMBER
We host researchers from India, Turkey, and the US who are collaborating on a study to evaluate the effectiveness of the International Guide for Monitoring Child Development.
Our Team

96% Guatemalan
90% Indigenous Maya
80% Women

We are a diverse 100+ member team of physicians, nurses, anthropologists, linguists, teachers, nutritionists, drivers, engineers, public health practitioners, lawyers, designers, accountants, communicators, entrepreneurs, and community health workers. We are united by our dedication to improving health and well-being in Guatemala.
MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER!
OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We have two boards, one based in the US and one in Guatemala. Each board serves different legal and organizational functions. The US board focuses principally on fundraising, financial management, and strategic direction, and the Guatemalan board focuses on program implementation and strategy.

We are so grateful to our dedicated board members and for the time and resources they contribute!
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PATRICK JENNINGS
US Board Member
Retired Healthcare Management Consultant
San Francisco, CA

SARAH KHO
US Board Member
Healthcare Engineering Program Manager
San Francisco, CA

CLAIRE MELVIN
US Board Member
Attorney
New York, NY

TOM MELVIN
US Board Treasurer
Financial Analyst
New York, NY

FELIPA MUS
Guatemala Board Member
Health Committee Volunteer
Guatemala

CAROLYN PURCELL
US Board Member
Retired Family Nurse
Mountain View, CA

RUSSELL ROHLOFF
US Financial Controller
Engineer
Bethel, VT

HEIDY ROQUEL
Guatemala Board Treasurer
Community Volunteer
Tecpán, Chimaltenango
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ANTONIO SIMAJ
Guatemala Board Secretary
Retired Firefighter, Community Volunteer
Nahualá, Sololá

SANDY SUDWEEKS
US Board Member
Retired Professor
Costa Mesa, CA

HERB VANHOOK
US Board Member
Information Technology Consultant
Rehoboth Beach, DE
Our programs interweave to provide comprehensive care for patients in rural Guatemala across their lifespan. Our physicians, nurses, health educators, community health workers, pharmacists, and drivers work together in rural communities to ensure that patients get the education, continuous care, resources, and emotional support they need to realize the best possible health and well-being. Throughout, we collect data and information on patient health and experiences that team members analyze to help improve care outcomes. At the same time, our Center for Indigenous Health Research is conducting groundbreaking studies on best practices in rural health that help advance our care. Read on for 2023 program highlights!
Our Women’s Health Program provides preventive health visits for more than 5,000 women a year in hundreds of small communities and homes, eliminating obstacles of distance and transportation, and making self-care more feasible for women who are balancing home and earning responsibilities.

Our nurses provide regular screening for cancer, diabetes, and other chronic conditions; family planning counseling and methods; and crucially, education and consultation in patients’ Mayan languages, building trust, and empowering women to take control of their health.

This year, we opened our new DNA lab, which enables more accurate and timely HPV testing for cervical cancer; and trained nurses to treat early-stage symptoms in the field. We also continued to grow our Salud para la Vida partnership with Friendship Bridge, a microfinance organization, bringing preventive health services to thousands of microfinance clients.
Guatemala has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in Latin America, particularly among indigenous mothers. Most deaths from childbirth can be prevented with timely diagnosis and hospital care. Our Maternal & Infant Health Program eliminates barriers to care, including language, cost, and discrimination. We have co-designed a smartphone application in partnership with safe + natal and Maya midwives so that they are better able to detect high-risk complications in the field. If hospital care is needed, our indigenous care navigators accompany mothers throughout, coordinating, translating, supporting, and advocating for mothers, and ultimately creating more positive hospital birth experiences for all involved.

In 2023, we received two major awards that recognize the value and potential of this work: the Maternal & Infant Health Award and the Google.org AI for the Global Goals Award. This support will enable us to continue to improve and expand the program to cover 2,000 births a year, and to explore the potential of AI to increase safe and healthy births in rural settings.
Al-Driven Low-Cost Ultrasound For Automated Quantification of Hypertension, Preeclampsia, and IUGR (2023-): Using artificial intelligence to develop techniques for predicting intrauterine growth restriction and preeclampsia from low-cost, hand-held maternal and fetal Doppler recordings, enabling mothers to receive more timely care for complications.

Partners: Emory University

Funding: National Institutes of Health / National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
FAMILY-CENTERED NUTRITION

Child malnutrition remains one of the most significant health issues in Guatemala, with rates approaching 70% in some rural, Maya communities. Malnutrition and stunting in the first years of life not only pose immediate health threats, but can also compromise future education, employment, and health prospects. Climate change is only making the problem worse, bringing droughts, floods, and storms that decimate crops.

To address this increasingly critical issue, our Family-Centered Nutrition Program team partners with caregivers of 800 children a year in the first 1,000 days of life to foster children’s growth and development. Nurses and nutrition technicians work with families to watch for key developmental milestones and to find sources for healthy, diverse nutrition using locally available foods.

In addition, we collaborate with an array of government, business, and nonprofit partners to identify and develop sustainable, comprehensive solutions that address the systemic factors driving this national crisis.
Aflatoxin Exposure, Growth Faltering, and the Gut Microbiome Among Children In Rural Guatemala (2023-): Investigating the role of aflatoxin, a mold that grows on crops, on child growth. Researchers are evaluating aflatoxin exposure, markers of inflammation, and gut microbiome composition and function.

Partners: Arizona State University

Funding: National Institutes of Health/National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

A Hybrid Effectiveness/Implementation Trial of the International Guide For Monitoring Child Development (GIMDI) (2021-): Assessing the implementation and effectiveness of the International Guide for Monitoring Child Development in India and Guatemala within established rural community health worker programs. The primary objectives are to understand barriers and supporting factors for implementing the guidelines and to assess their effectiveness in diverse contexts.

Partners: Brigham and Women’s Hospital

Funding: National Institutes of Health / National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

Effects of Complementary Feeding of Eggs on Infant Development and Growth In Guatemala (2020-): Investigating the impact of daily egg consumption on addressing child malnutrition.

Funding: American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Mobile Health Intervention to Promote Positive Infant Health Outcomes In Guatemala (2021-): Developing and determining the effectiveness of smartphone technology that can be used to engage primary caregivers directly in the active monitoring of their infants’ development, and to provide tailored feedback and support for the provision of nurturing care and positive infant developmental outcomes.

Partners: Children’s Hospital Los Angeles

Funding: National Institutes of Health / National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
CHRONIC DISEASE & COMPLEX CARE

Living in rural Guatemala with a complex or chronic disease often means going without treatment due to challenges finding good quality, affordable care and medications. This results in far worse health outcomes and complications that might otherwise be avoided, such as blindness and amputations for patients with diabetes. Patients with the most difficult cases find their way to us through referrals from the public health system, community members, and our other programs.

We bring together clinical care and health education in patients’ Mayan languages and work with patients and their families over the long term to achieve the best possible results. We are experts in managing both adult and pediatric chronic diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, cancer, kidney failure, epilepsy, and rheumatoid arthritis. We also collaborate with the Ministry of Health and others in efforts to improve care for chronic and complex conditions across rural Guatemala.
CENTER FOR INDIGENOUS HEALTH RESEARCH
CHRONIC DISEASE STUDIES

Promoting Safe and Healthy Workplaces in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador
(PREP for Change) (2023-) Improving occupational safety and health (OSH) conditions for
workers in the sugar and garment (maquila) sectors, with a focus on workplace illnesses and
injuries, chronic kidney disease of non-traditional causes (CKDnt), and Covid.

Partners: La Isla Network

Funding: US Department of Labor

Exploring Risk Factors and Predictors of Endemic CKDU in Agricultural Regions of Four
Central America Countries (2022-): Identifying risk factors for chronic kidney disease of
unknown origin (CKDU) and decline in kidney function in Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua, and
Guatemala. This work is being conducted through the SALTRA (Central American Program for
Health, Work and Environment) network connecting locally-based universities, NGOs,
governmental organizations, public health authorities and local healthcare workers.

Partners: Programa Salud, Trabajo y Ambiente (SALTRA), Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica

Funding: National Institutes of Health/National Institute of Environmental Health
Sciences/National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Our community health workers, care navigators, drivers, and nurses travel thousands of miles every year throughout Guatemala’s rural Highlands, providing care, delivering food and medications, and offering education and encouragement to families facing health challenges.

The following reports offer a look into their long days and remarkable dedication, and the wonderful patients they meet every day.
DELIVERING HEALTH FOR LIFE

Our Salud para la Vida (Health for Life) program with Friendship Bridge brings preventive healthcare to thousands of women living in rural communities where such care is ordinarily not available. Here’s a glimpse into the work of Salud para la Vida nurses.

As daylight approaches, we roll into bustling Los Encuentros to pick up Salud Para la Vida nurse Alicia and trainee Reyna, who have traveled on foot and by bus from their respective homes to meet the Maya Health Alliance | Wuqu’ Kawaq van. A short distance down the Pan-American Highway, we peel off onto a road lined with apple orchards and corn rows extending up impossibly steep slopes. Before long, the truck is switch-backing its way up rutted dirt roads until Alicia signals for the driver to pull over. The two women spring from the truck carrying backpacks and Wuqu’ Kawaq totes and start up a slick trail, straddling the path to get purchase on the grassy edges and avoid slipping in the muck.

After a 15-minute climb, they arrive at a home perched on the hillside where they’re greeted by Josefa, a Salud Para la Vida client who has cleared a room in her home to host a pop-up community clinic. Alicia and Reyna quickly produce a full medical office from their packs, arranging a blood pressure cuff, test kits, gloves, masks, sanitizer, cotton balls, and educational aids on a small table in the center of the room. They place a scale on the floor and unscroll a long paper with tick marks that they affix to the wall to measure height.

Reyna demonstrates breast self exams.
Their first patient is their host Josefa, who runs a weaving business in addition to overseeing her household. For Josefa and each woman who follows, Alicia and Reyna check height and weight, take blood samples and blood pressure readings, demonstrate breast exams, and offer cervical cancer testing, recording notes on their tablets in each patient’s medical record. They flow between Spanish and the K’iche’ Mayan language, taking the lead from their patients.

The next patient, Lucia, shares that she has walked an hour from a nearby village for a chance to see the nurses. When her exam is finished, she presses her fingerprint onto her health record, offers her thanks, and sets out for the long walk home. Next, the nurses greet Manuela, who brings her small daughter after dropping another child at school.

*Alicia explains the process for cervical cancer testing.*

Just as Alicia and Reyna are packing up their last bag, they learn another woman, Maria, is hurrying to see them. They unpack and the room is ready when she arrives. Maria, a 26-year-old wife and mother of one child, listens intently when the nurses describe the importance of cervical cancer screening and demonstrate the process with a model cervix.

In the end, she demurs, explaining she would need her husband’s permission for such an intimate exam. The nurses encourage her to have a conversation with her husband and consider the test for a future visit. They pack up shop, head down the hill, and make their way to the women awaiting them at the end of another trail.
MANAGING DIABETES WITH LOVE & SUPPORT

Dorcas and her mother Doña Albertina

Our diabetes nurses and doctors work one-on-one with patients in their homes. These home visits help our team better understand patients’ particular challenges and see the resources they have available to manage their care so that they can work with patients like Dorcas and Doña Albertina for the best possible outcomes.

When Dorcas discovered that she had diabetes in 2019, her husband left her, fearing he might “catch it.”

Since then, Dorcas has managed to support her seven year-old daughter and her mother, Doña Albertina, who also has diabetes, by washing clothes at the public pila. She gets help from her sister, who also lives with the family in the town of Tecpán.

Before joining our Diabetes Program, Dorcas and Doña Albertina tried treating their condition with natural remedies recommended in their community such as cow bile, whiskey blended with lemon, quitele, guava leaves, and hibiscus tea. In the end, none of this helped improve their situations, and both Dorcas and her mother’s blood sugar levels remained dangerously high. Dorcas was underweight and had very little energy; she wanted to spend much of her time sleeping. Eventually, she found Maya Health Alliance through a referral from the local health center.
Maya Health Diabetes Educator Damaris worked with mother and daughter, helping them learn about diabetes and what they could do to treat the condition. Damaris shared, "Damaris taught me the rules, she taught me the 'four legs of the chair': she told me that if I exercise, take my medicines, follow my diet, and do my check-ups, I will be fine."

In addition to education, the Diabetes Program provided Dorcas with insulin, which is extremely costly and difficult to acquire outside major cities in Guatemala.

Although Dorcas’s situation improved, the Maya Health team became concerned that she did not seem entirely well. During home visits, they learned that Dorcas had been dividing her insulin doses to share with her mother. Upon discovering this, the team enrolled Doña Albertina in the Diabetes Program, and both women currently have their diabetes under control.

Dorcas now has more energy to care for her daughter and her mother, who has been losing her vision due to diabetes.

Dorcas confers with Diabetes Nurse Carol.
NAVIGATING A PATH TO LIFESAVING CARE

Whenever possible, we provide care in patients’ homes and communities, avoiding stressful and expensive trips to specialists and hospitals in Guatemala City. In cases that require advanced care, we offer transportation and care navigation to help patients manage visits to teeming hospitals and medical centers where few, if any, Mayan languages are spoken. Here’s what that looked like one Tuesday in April.

Driver Doroteo left Tecpán headquarters for Guatemala City at 3:30 am in a Maya Health van carrying patient care coordinator Yesenia and patients headed for INCAN, the national cancer hospital in Guatemala City. They arrived shortly before 6 am, just in time to secure appointments for the first half of the day. Yesenia joined a line winding through the packed lobby to collect appointment numbers for the patients, then escorted the group through a maze of hallways to their respective waiting areas.

Yesenia helps a patient manage paperwork.

As the patients settled in for hours-long waits, Yesenia continued her circuit through the hospital, gathering receipts and papers, knocking on unmarked doors to talk with nurses managing the flow, and stopping periodically to check with the patients to see if they needed help with translation from Spanish or simply a few reassuring words.
Knowing whose doors to knock on can make all the difference.

Midstream, she returned to the van so that she and Doroteo could haul boxes of special milk formula imported from the United States to a waiting taxi that would then transport the boxes to the town of Jalapa, the home of two young patients with complex medical problems who require this special nutrient to survive.

After that, Doroteo set out to pick up Ludwin, a 23-year-old with severe sight and dental problems stemming from diabetes, for a visit to an eye specialist. As he and his mother waited in the crowded clinic, Yesenia helped arrange for a discount for an ultrasound and discovered a special clinic day when he could have surgery without charge. A month later, he would come back for cataract surgery that ultimately would restore his vision.

Yesenia returned to the cancer hospital to welcome Filipa, a longtime patient who had recently completed treatment for cervical cancer and had come for a follow-up test. Yesenia joined Filipa for her appointment, facing down a harried nurse who disputed a detail on Filipa’s payment slip and threatened to keep her from entering the consultation room. Filipa’s test results indicated that the cancer had been successfully treated but that other potential problems required more investigation, so Yesenia scheduled a follow-up appointment before offering a quick hug goodbye.

While patients finished their hospital visits, Yesenia made her way through several blocks swarming with vendors selling snacks, masks, and Bibles to a pharmacy known to have reasonable rates for insulin, which is prohibitive in much of Guatemala.

At 4 pm, with all appointments completed and payments submitted, the patients loaded back into the van for the two-hour ride home. Within minutes, nearly everyone was asleep except Yesenia and Doroteo, who worked together to lay out the fastest route as the van inched homeward through the city traffic.
2023 FINANCIALS

2023 REVENUE: $3,996,210

- Foundation contributions - 79%
- Individual contributions - 18%
- Corporate contributions - 1.2%
- Contributions from nonprofits - 1%
- Investment income - 0.8%

2023 EXPENSES: $2,351,011

- Programs - 78%
- Admin & General - 13%
- Fundraising - 8%
- Currency Exchange - 1%
PROGRAMS: $1,824,94
PARTNERS

Maximizing impact through collaboration

Our rich network of partnerships is key to our success!
PARTNERS
2023 PUBLICATIONS

The Center for Indigenous Health Research, founded by Maya Health Alliance | Wuqu’ Kawoq, is a leader in global health research. Below are some of the publications our research team produced in 2023 in areas including kidney disease, nutrition, and vaccine acceptance.


